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PLATO AS A CRITIC OF ATHENS

Émile Faguet¹, in discussing the development of Plato's thought, makes the following statements: "La mort de Socrate a inspiré à Platon toutes ses haines. Les haines de Platon lui ont inspiré toutes ses idées". The first two objects of hatred which M. Faguet discusses are the Athenians and the Athenian democracy. He writes further: "Le fond de sa politique n'est pas autre chose que l'horreur des Athéniens".

The object of this paper is to consider whether Plato's attitude should be described in such terms, and to investigate the allied question of his patriotism and his conception of his duty as an Athenian citizen.

Many passages show that he was anything but blind to Athens's claims to distinction. Athens is supreme in such things as tragic poetry²; she allows the greatest freedom of speech³; she is the very sanctuary of the wisdom of Greece⁴. In the *Laws*⁵ the following eulogy is put into the mouth of the Spartan Megillus: "... I regard as absolutely true the common saying that 'good Athenians are always incomparably good,' for they alone are good not by outward compulsion but by inner disposition..." We even find in the *Laws*⁶ two passages in which Plato speaks with qualified approval of a system of election by lot.

Some words of praise are accorded to Pericles, as being skilled in rhetoric and in the learning of Anaxagoras⁷, as the all-powerful director of the destiny of Hellas and mighty barbarian nations⁸, and as one of the few politicians who have been sufficiently educated for their calling⁹.

In the funeral oration in the *Menexenus*, attributed to Aspasia¹⁰, we have a eulogy of the achievements and the constitution of Athens which bears many resemblances to the funeral speech of Pericles in *Thucydides* 2.35-46. While critics generally agree that Plato's ultimate object in composing this rhetorical exercise was simply to justify and support his attacks on the rhetoricians, there is a difference of opinion as to his method of attaining that end. On the one hand it is held that the work is a satire on the vain flatteries of the conventional funeral speeches of the orators and on the foolish vanity of their audiences; on the other hand it may

be regarded as a serious effort to produce a masterpiece of patriotic oratory. The question is difficult to decide. We are confronted in the oration with many palpable misstatements of fact and with not a little meretricious oratory, but combined with these are many passages of apparently sincere patriotism.

The speech begins with a tribute to the dead and their fatherland. The Athenians are reminded that their fathers were children of the soil, dwelling in their own land—their own true mother, not a step-mother. The city is to be praised as being dear to the gods, and as having selected and brought forth man—not savage monsters such as other countries begat—, and as having supported her children with all the fruits of the earth. Thus begotten and educated, the ancestors of the departed lived and made themselves a government which reflected their own goodness. It may be called a democracy, or it may receive other names, but it is really an aristocracy backed by popular approbation. The people exercises most power, but entrusts positions of authority to the best men, debarring no one because of his weakness or poverty or the obscurity of his parentage.

Next follows a highly eulogistic account of the history of Athens from the Persian Wars to about 386 B. C. Since this passage occurs in a funeral oration, it naturally cannot be subjected to the tests to which a sober historical narrative is subjected. Censure of Athens would be as unfitting as censure of the dead themselves. Hence Plato minimizes defeats¹¹, exaggerates the importance or the merit of victories¹², or ascribes too lofty or altruistic motives to the policies of Athens¹³.

In general, it is for the Athens of the past that Plato has the highest praise. Thus in the Egyptian myth of the *Timaeus* he gives an idealized account of early Athenian history. He tells us that 9,000 years ago Athens was preeminent for the excellence of her laws. The citizens were divided into classes, each doing its own work. Athena had selected the site for the city because she saw that the happy temperament of the seasons would produce the wisest of men¹⁴. In these early times Athens had fought alone against the united power of Atlantis, and, though deserted by the other Hellenes, had maintained the liberty of Hellas¹⁵. Here, and in a similar passage in the *Critias*¹⁶, we have a glorification of the Persian Wars and an idealized description of the early constitution of Athens.

¹Émile Faguet, *Pour Qu'on Lise Platon*, 16 (Paris, Boivin. No publication date is given).

²*Laches* 183 A-B.

³*Gorgias* 461 E. For the same idea in a negative form compare *Meno* 80 B.

⁴*Protagoras* 337 D. Compare *Alcibiades I* 124 E, *Protagoras* 319 B.

⁵*Laws* 642 C. Translations of Plato in this paper, text and notes, are from The Loeb Classical Library versions of Plato.

⁶*Laws* 690 C-D, 759 B.

⁷*Phaedrus* 269 E.

⁸*Alcibiades I* 104 B.

⁹*Alcibiades I* 118 B.

¹⁰*Menexenus* 236 D-249 C.

¹¹*Menexenus* 242 B, 243 A, 243 D.

¹²241 B, 241 C, 242 C.

¹³242 B, 242 C, 243 A, 244 D, 244 E.

¹⁴*Timaeus* 23 E-24 D.

¹⁵*Critias* 108 E-121 C.

A more dispassionate and critical description of the government is found in a passage in the *Laws*¹⁶:

We ought to examine next, in like manner, the Attic polity, and show how complete liberty, unfettered by any authority, is vastly inferior to a moderate form of government under elected magistrates. At the time when the Persians made their onslaught upon the Greeks... we Athenians had an ancient constitution, and magistrates based on a fourfold grading; and we had Reverence, which acted as a kind of queen, causing us to live as the willing slaves of the existing laws... So all this created in them a state of friendliness one towards another—both the fear which then possessed them, and that begotten of the past, which they had acquired by their subjection to the former laws—the fear to which, in our former discussions, we have often given the name of "reverence," saying that a man must be subject to this if he is to be good (though the coward is unfettered and unafrighted by it)...

This passage furnishes a convenient transition to the subject of Plato's criticism of Athens, for almost immediately after this passage he proceeds to describe the subsequent degeneration, as follows¹⁷:

"...Just reflect: seeing that we Athenians suffered practically the same fate as the Persians—they through reducing their people to the extreme of slavery, we, on the contrary, by urging on our populace to the extreme of liberty—what are we to say was the sequel...? ... Under the old laws, my friends, our commons had no control over anything, but were, so to say, voluntary slaves to the laws." "What laws do you mean?" "Those dealing with the music of that age, in the first place,—to describe from its commencement how the life of excessive liberty grew up. Among us, at that time, music was divided into various classes and styles... So these and other kinds being classified and fixed, it was forbidden to set one kind of words to a different class of tune. The authority whose duty it was to know these regulations, and, when known, to apply them in its judgments and to penalize the disobedient, was not a pipe nor, as now, the mob's unmusical shoutings, nor yet the clappings which mark applause: in place of this, it was a rule made by those in control of education that they themselves should listen throughout in silence, while the children and their ushers and the general crowd were kept in order by the discipline of the rod. In the matter of music the populace willingly submitted to orderly control and abstained from outrageously judging by clamour; but later on, with the progress of time, there arose as leaders of unmusical illegality poets who, though by nature poetical, were ignorant of what was just and lawful in music;... they unwittingly bore false witness against music, as a thing without any standard of correctness, of which the best criterion is the pleasure of the auditor, be he a good man or a bad... Hence the theatregoers became noisy instead of silent, as though they knew the difference between good and bad music, and in place of an aristocracy in music there sprang up a kind of base theocracy... if in music, and music only, there had arisen a democracy of free men, such a result would not have been so very alarming; but as it was, the universal conceit of universal wisdom and the contempt for law originated in the music, and on the heels of these came liberty. For, thinking themselves knowing, men became fearless; and audacity begat effrontery... Next after this form of liberty would come that which refuses to be subject to the rulers; and, following on that, the shirking of submission to one's parents and elders and their admonitions; then, as the penultimate stage, comes the effort to disregard the laws; while the last stage of all is to lose all respect for oaths or pledges or divinities..."

¹⁶Laws 698 A-699 C.

¹⁷Laws 699 E-701 C.

In this degenerate Athens there were many things which Plato found to criticize. To begin with, the Athenian system of education and training for public life, or rather the lack of any good system of training for public life, is frequently noticed. For statesmen did not concern themselves with educational questions¹⁸, and the Sophists were the only professors of any higher education¹⁹. The people maintained an attitude of jealous hostility toward any who professed to teach wisdom²⁰, parents generally neglected the education of their sons²¹, and such teachers as were to be had were incapable of giving the highest kind of training and were commonly discredited²². There were men who possessed great technical skill, but this could not take the place of higher education²³. The students of philosophy themselves dropped their studies too soon and entered political life immature and inadequately trained²⁴.

For the political leaders of Athens Plato has many words of censure. He pays homage to them at times as great figures in history, but generally it is a very unfavorable picture which he gives of them. The politician, compared with the philosopher, is as the slave to the freeman; being the slave of those with whom the decision of the case rests, he is keen and shrewd, but stunted in intellect and practised in flattery and deception; compared with the philosopher and the king, he ranks only third²⁵. The would-be statesmen are the mutinous crew of the ship of State, who look upon the true helmsmen as good-for-nothings and stargazers²⁶. The politician's throng of followers are many of them like lions and centaurs and many more like satyrs and such weak and shifty creatures, Protean shapes changing quickly into one another's forms and natures, while the politician himself appears as the chief of sophists and the most skillful of wizards, and must at any cost be distinguished from the true king or statesmen²⁷. In less fanciful language Plato tells us that contemporary politicians are no better than their constituents²⁸, that they are wise only in their own conceit and impatient of being told so²⁹, and that, instead of trying to lift themselves above the level of their compatriot rivals and of trying to vie with the rulers of Persia and Sparta, they now³⁰

...give attention to Midias the quail-breeder and others like him, who manage our politics; in whom, as the women would remark, you may still see the slave's cut of hair cropping out of their minds as well as on their pates; and they come with their barbarous lingo to flatter us and not to rule us.

Still worse is the hybrid class of philosopher-politicians who aim to know only the requisite amount of both arts, while in reality they are inferior both to philosophers and to politicians³¹.

In general, Plato's charges against the statesmen of

¹⁸Euthyphro 2 D. ¹⁹Laches 186 C.

²⁰Euthyphro 3 C, Protagoras 316 D, Laches 184 B.

²¹Laches 179 A-D, Alcibiades I 122 A-B.

²²Republic 535 C-D, 498 E, Euthydemus 306 E-307 A, Protagoras 318 E.

²³Apology 22 D, Charmides 173 A-174 D.

²⁴Menexenus 234 A, Gorgias 486 A-B, Republic 498 A, Alcibiades I 120 A-C, 133 A.

²⁵Theaetetus 172 D-173 B, Phaedrus 248 D.

²⁶Republic 480 C.

²⁷Politicus 291 A-C. ²⁸Ibidem, 275 C. ²⁹Apology 21 C-E.

³⁰Alcibiades I 120 A-B. ³¹Euthydemus 305 C-306 D.

Athens are that they did not rule by knowledge or philosophic principles³²; they could not teach their art to their sons or other successors³³, and they gave the people what it wanted, not what it needed³⁴. The true legislator, Plato suggests, will consider the whole of virtue in framing his laws, instead of following the piecemeal methods of contemporary inventors of laws. For such reasons as these, Socrates proclaims paradoxically that he himself is the only true statesman of his time, in that he advocates not what is pleasantest, but what is best³⁵.

Essentially the same criticism of statesmen is expressed in the *Meno*³⁶, but there it is qualified and rendered less harsh by the express recognition of the fact that right opinion, as well as knowledge, plays an important part in the direction of human affairs. Like soothsayers and diviners politicians are inspired to utter many a truth which they do not fully understand.

Of the Athenian citizen body Plato had no higher opinion. It was a consummate democracy, just as Persia was a consummate monarchy³⁷, but, as he jestingly puts it, Athens was bankrupt of wisdom, which had taken flight to Thessaly, and did not know what true virtue was³⁸. Of 'the many' Plato repeatedly speaks with contempt. They may try to frighten men with hobgoblin terrors³⁹, but they are empty talkers⁴⁰, of no account compared with the wise⁴¹, and incapable of attaining a knowledge of political science⁴².

In the *Gorgias*⁴³ Socrates asks,

How can a man best spend his appointed time? By assimilating himself to the constitution under which he lives? As you at this moment have to consider how you may become as like as possible to the Athenian people. . . . He then who will make you most like them will make you as you desire, a statesman and an orator; for every man is pleased when he is spoken to in his own language and dislikes any other.

Hence we have the language of the rhetoricians, the effects of which are humorously described in the *Menexenus*⁴⁴. It is not a great or noble art, for it has an easy task in praising Athenians among the Athenians⁴⁵. It is a shadow of a part of politics⁴⁶; it produces opinion or belief, not knowledge⁴⁷, and it is akin to the art of the enchanter, acting not upon snakes, spiders, and scorpions, but upon dicasts, ecclesiasts, and other bodies of men⁴⁸. Thus the rhetoricians have great powers of persuasion⁴⁹, but they have least real power, for they can do nothing of what they will, but only what they think best, i. e. expedient⁵⁰.

The art of the rhetoricians was exercised in the assembly and in the law-courts. Of both of these Plato gives vivid satirical pictures. In the *Republic*⁵¹, in

speaking of the people as the great sophist and corrupter, he says that its influence is exercised

...when the multitude are seated together in assemblies or in court-rooms or theatres or camps or any other public gathering of a crowd, and with loud uproar censure some of the things that are said and done and approve others, both in excess, with full-throated clamour and clapping of hands, and thereto the rocks and the region round about re-echoing redouble the din of the censure and the praise. In such case how do you think the young man's heart, as the saying is, is moved within him? What private teaching do you think will hold out and not rather be swept away by the torrent of censure and applause, and borne off on its current, so that he will affirm the same things that they do to be honourable and base, and will do as they do, and be even such as they?

The futility of the assembly's legislation is shown in the following conversation between Socrates and Adeimantus⁵²:

"Yes, my friend, provided God grants them the preservation of the principles of law that we have already discussed." "Failing that," said he, "they will pass their lives multiplying such petty laws and amending them in the expectation of attaining what is best." "You mean," said I, "that the life of such citizens will resemble that of men who are sick, yet from intemperance are unwilling to abandon their unwholesome regimen." "By all means." "And truly," said I, "these latter go on in a most charming fashion. For with all their doctoring they accomplish nothing except to complicate and augment their maladies. And they are always hoping that some one will recommend a panacea that will restore their health. . . ."

The Athenian people is good-naturedly satirized in the description of the master of the ship in the parable of the ship and the mutinous crew⁵³: "...Picture a shipmaster in height and strength surpassing all others on the ship, but who is slightly deaf and of similarly impaired vision, and whose knowledge of navigation is on a par with his sight and hearing. . . ."

In another passage⁵⁴ the people is likened to a great wild beast, but the comparison cannot be pressed, as it is here the politicians rather than the people that are satirized. After describing the purely empirical knowledge of the keeper of a great beast which gives expression to its feelings by various inarticulate cries, Socrates asks,

...Do you suppose that there is any difference between such a one and the man who thinks that it is wisdom to have learned to know the moods and the pleasures of the motley multitude in their assembly, whether about painting or music or, for that matter, politics? For if a man associates with these and offers and exhibits to them his poetry or any other product of his craft or any political service, and grants the mob authority over himself more than is unavoidable, the proverbial necessity of Diomedes will compel him to give the public what it likes, but that what it likes is really good and honourable, have you ever heard an attempted proof of this that is not simply ridiculous?

The courts of law also suffer from an excess of rhetoric and mob rule. Plato has strong condemnation for the practice of trying to influence the decision of a court by appearing as a cringing suppliant⁵⁵, by producing a multitude of witnesses⁵⁶, or by creating a dis-

³²Alcibiades I 118 C-119 B, *Meno* 99 B.

³³*Meno* 93 A-94 E, 99 B, Alcibiades I 118 C-119 B, 122 A-B, *Protagoras* 320 A, 329 A.

³⁴Laws 636 E, Alcibiades I 134 A-B, *Gorgias* 503 A-D, 513 C-522 E.

³⁵*Gorgias* 521 D. ³⁶*Meno* 99 B, 100 A. ³⁷Laws 693 D.

³⁸*Meno* 70 A-71 A. Compare Alcibiades I 110 E-111 C, 112 C.

³⁹*Crito* 46 C. ⁴⁰*Protagoras* 317 A, 352 B, Laws 641 E.

⁴¹*Symposium* 194 C, *Crito* 44 C-D, *Gorgias* 474 A.

⁴²*Politicus* 292 E-293 A. ⁴³*Gorgias* 512 E-513 C.

⁴⁴*Menexenus* 235 A-B. ⁴⁵*Ibidem*, 236 A. ⁴⁶*Gorgias* 463 D.

⁴⁷*Gorgias* 455 A, *Phaedrus* 260 A, 272 E.

⁴⁸*Euthydemus* 289 E-290 A.

⁴⁹*Gorgias* 459 A, *Phaedrus* 261 A-E. ⁵⁰*Gorgias* 466 A-E.

⁵¹*Republic* 492 A-C. Compare 494 C-D, *Gorgias* 481 E.

⁵²*Republic* 425 E-426 A. Compare 426 C-E.

⁵³*Republic* 488 A-B. ⁵⁴*Republic* 493 A-D.

⁵⁵*Apology* 34 C. ⁵⁶*Gorgias* 472 A.

turbance and uproar⁴⁷. He holds that a multitude of judges will not easily judge well⁴⁸. The most serious evil, the perversion of justice by the use of rhetoric, is described in one of the preambles in the Laws⁴⁹:

Although there are many fair things in human life, yet to most of them there clings a kind of canker which poisons and corrupts them. None would deny that justice between men is a fair thing, and that it has civilized all human affairs. And if justice be fair, how can we deny that pleading is also a fair thing? But these fair things are in disrepute owing to a kind of foul art, which, cloaking itself under a fair name, claims, first, that there exists a device for dealing with lawsuits, and further, that it is one which is able, by pleading and helping another to plead, to win the victory, whether the pleas concerned be just or unjust; and it also asserts that both this art itself and the arguments which proceed from it are a gift offered to any man who gives money in exchange. This art—whether it be really an art or merely an artless trick got by habit and practice—must never, if possible, arise in our State....

The Athenian courts would be no place for the true philosopher, as we learn from the following⁵⁰:

And again, do you think it at all strange, if a man returning from divine contemplations to the petty miseries of men cuts a sorry figure and appears most ridiculous, if, while still blinking through the gloom, and before he has become sufficiently accustomed to the envying darkness, he is compelled in court-rooms or elsewhere to contend about the shadows of justice or the images that cast the shadows and to wrangle in debate about the notions of these things in the minds of those who have never seen justice itself?

Turning to the subject of Athenian imperialism and sea-power, we find that Plato holds views very similar to those of Pseudo-Xenophon. In discussing the location of a new colony, the Athenian of the Laws says⁵¹,

...the sea is, in very truth, "a right briny and bitter neighbour", although there is sweetness in its proximity for the uses of daily life; for by filling the markets of the city with foreign merchandise and retail trading, and breeding in men's souls slavish and tricky ways, it renders the city faithless and loveless, not to itself only, but to the rest of the world as well. But in this respect our State has compensation in the fact that it is all-productive; and since it is hilly, it cannot be highly productive as well as all-productive; if it were, and supplied many exports, it would be flooded in return with gold and silver money—the one condition of all, perhaps, that is most fatal, in a State, to the acquisition of noble and just habits of life....

The reminiscences of Athens here are obvious, as also in the following⁵²:

...most of the Greeks arrange for their food to be derived from both land and sea, but our people will derive it only from the land. This makes the lawgiver's task easier; for in this case half the number of laws, or less, will suffice, and the laws, too, will be better fitted for free men. For the lawgiver of our State is rid, for the most part, of shipping and merchandise and peddling and inn-keeping and customs and mines and loans and usury, and countless matters of a like kind; he can say goodbye to all such, and legislate for farmers and shepherds and bee-keepers, and concerning the preservation and supervision of the instruments employed in these occupations....

In speaking of democracy in general Plato offers many implied criticisms of Athens. Thus we read⁵³, "The government of the many is in every respect weak and unable to do either any great good or any great evil, when compared with the others, because the offices are too minutely subdivided and too many hold them". Thus he concludes that it is the best of the lawless, and the worst of the lawful, forms of government. Elsewhere⁵⁴ he describes how democracy comes into power after slaying or exiling its opponents, and confers equality of freedom and power on all. The city is full of freedom of action and speech; a man may say and do what he likes. The individual orders his own life; hence there is the greatest variety of natures. This seems likely to be the fairest of States, being like an embroidered robe which is spangled with every sort of flower. There are many who, like women and children, admire this variety of hues. There is no better place to look for a government, for, because of their liberty, they have a complete assortment of constitutions, like a bazaar where everything can be bought. There is no necessity for anyone to govern or be governed or to comply with the law if it forbids him to hold office. Truly a charming form of government!

The 'democratic man' is described as follows⁵⁵:

...And does he not also live out his life in this fashion, day by day indulging the appetite of the day, now wine-bibbing and abandoning himself to the lascivious pleasing of the flute and again drinking only water and dieting; and at one time exercising his body, and sometimes idling and neglecting all things, and at another time seeming to occupy himself with philosophy. And frequently he goes in for politics and bounces up and says and does whatever enters his head. And if military men excite his emulation, thither he rushes, and if moneyed men, to that he turns, and there is no order or compulsion in his existence, but he calls this life of his the life of pleasure and freedom and happiness and cleaves to it to the end.

In discussing the transition from democracy to tyranny, Plato has a further opportunity to criticize the former by pointing out the elements in it which cause weakness and instability⁵⁶. Democracy, he says, has her own good, the insatiable desire of which brings her own destruction. Under democracy freedom is the glory of the State. The insatiable desire of this and the neglect of other things introduce the change in democracy which occasions the demand for tyranny. When a democracy that is thirsting for freedom has had cup-bearers and has drunk to excess of the strong wine of freedom, then, unless the rulers are amenable and give a plentiful draught, she punishes them and calls them accursed oligarchs. Loyal citizens are insulted as willing slaves and men of nought; she desires subjects who are like rulers and rulers who are like subjects. In such a State can liberty have any limit? By degrees the anarchy finds a way into private houses and ends by getting among the animals and infecting them. Father and son, old and young, master and pupil, are all on a level. The last extreme is when the slave is just as free as his owner. The citizens chafe impatiently at the least touch

⁴⁷Laws 876 A-B.

⁴⁸Laws 766 E.

⁴⁹Laws 937 D-938 A. ⁵⁰Republic 517 D-E.

⁵¹Laws 705 A-B. Compare Laws 792 D-E.

⁵²Laws 842 C-D.

⁵³There is no note 63.

⁵⁴Politicus 303 A-B.

⁵⁵Republic 557 A-558 A. Compare Laws 757 A-758 A.

⁵⁶Republic 561 C-E.

⁵⁷Ibidem, 562 B-566 D.

of authority and at length cease to care for the laws. Finally excessive liberty brings a reaction of excessive slavery, and tyranny appears. The common evil of oligarchy and democracy is the class of idle spendthrifts, the drones, with or without stings. There are three classes in the State—first, the drones, who are almost the entire ruling power, the more clever ones speaking and acting and the rest buzzing around the *bema* and not allowing a word to be said on the other side, second, the wealthy and orderly class, who provide honey for the drones, and third, the working class, which, when assembled, is the largest and most powerful in a democracy. But the many are seldom willing to congregate unless they get some honey and this is provided when the leaders deprive the rich of their estates and distribute them among the people, though taking care to reserve the greater part for themselves. The wealthy are forced to defend themselves against the people, who charge them with being conspirators and friends of oligarchy, not of their own accord, but being ignorant and deceived by informers. Finally the wealthy, goaded by the stings of the drones, are forced to become real oligarchs. Then come impeachments and trials. The people have some champion, who, once he has tasted blood, becomes a tyrant. He is driven out, but comes back, a full-grown tyrant requesting a body guard, and democracy is overthrown.

Although not specifically mentioned in all this, it is quite evident that Athens furnished Plato with his chief model for this description, although a few details may also be based upon his experience in Italy and in Sicily. He takes another opportunity of criticizing Athenian principles of government in a passage in the *Politicus*⁶⁸, in which the subject of the government by fixed laws is under discussion. Suppose, he says, that these principles were applied to the arts of the pilot and the physician in order to prevent misconduct. An assembly of laymen would enact rules to be followed rigidly; pilots and physicians would be chosen for a year by lot and called to account at the end of their term. Speculations and innovations in these arts would be strictly forbidden and they would utterly perish.

Nevertheless Plato would have preferred a system of government by fixed law to the Athenian system of government by rhetoric and caprice. Laws are the product of experience and the work of wise men⁶⁹, and they bring salvation and every blessing that the gods can confer⁷⁰. Yet government by fixed laws is to be condemned. At best, it is only the second choice⁷¹, for the rule of the wise man is better than the rule of the law which cannot adequately deal with the complexity of human affairs and which is sometimes like an obstinate and ignorant tyrant⁷², and useful only because the ruler cannot give his attention to every individual case that arises⁷³. But, while the ideal government for Athens or any other State is that of the philosopher-king⁷⁴ who will direct everything with reference to the ideal of

the political art, Plato recognizes that in practice government by laws is the only salvation for States⁷⁵.

From these passages it is clear that Plato was a stern critic of Athenian government and virtually a member of the opposition, a body which at times may perform useful and salutary work. Yet some have confused opposition and disloyalty, and have accused Plato of being a bad Athenian. The charges against him might be summed up as follows: (1) he took no part in Athenian public life; (2) he spoke disparagingly of great Athenians; (3) he habitually praised Sparta; (4) in his later years he went to the court of the tyrant of Syracuse, where, if all had gone well, he might have spent the rest of his life.

In answer to the first of these charges, Plato might perhaps have used the argument of Socrates in the *Apology*⁷⁶, that a good man would accomplish nothing and only bring about his own destruction by fighting against overwhelming odds. Things had come to such a pass in Athenian public life that the only service that Plato could render was in the field of political philosophy and the building of Utopias⁷⁷. The conduct of the oligarchs in 411 and 403 B. C. had turned him against their party, and the judicial murder of Socrates turned him against the democrats. Since there was no place for him in the cave, he could only strive toward the upper light. His feelings are well described (whether by himself or by another) in the Seventh Platonic Epistle⁷⁸:

In the days of my youth my experience was the same as that of many others. I thought that as soon as I should become my own master I would immediately enter into public life. But it so happened, I found, that the following changes occurred in the political situation. . . . Thirty were established as irresponsible rulers of all. Now some of these were actually connections and acquaintances of mine; and indeed they invited me at once to join their administration, thinking it would be congenial. The feelings I then experienced, owing to my youth, were in no way surprising: for I imagined that they would administer the State by leading it out of an unjust way of life into a just way, and consequently I gave my mind to them very diligently, to see what they would do. And indeed I saw how these men within a short time caused men to look back on the former government as a golden age. . . . But in no long time the power of the Thirty was overthrown together with the whole of the government which then existed. Then once again I was really, though less urgently, impelled with a desire to take part in public and political affairs. . . . The exiles who then returned exercised no little moderation. But, as ill-luck would have it, certain men of authority summoned our comrade Socrates before the law-courts.

So ended Plato's political activity at Athens.

As to the charge that Plato spoke disparagingly of great Athenians, it has been shown that there are eulogies to set over against his criticisms, and that, even when he criticizes, he frequently does so in a tone of deference and respect. Indeed his only quarrel with the elder statesmen of Athens was that they fell short of his ideal rulers.

⁶⁸Laws 714 D, 715 C-D, *Politicus* 300 A-B, *Crito* 50 B.

⁶⁹*Apology* 31 C-32 E. Compare *Hippias Maior* 281 C. In *Republic* 320 B there is a suggestion of another line of defence of which Plato might have availed himself.

⁷⁰Compare *Faguet*, Chapter VII, pages 83-94 (see note 1, above).

⁷¹324 B-325 B.

⁶⁸*Politicus* 297 D-299 E.

⁶⁹*Politicus* 300 B.

⁷⁰Laws 715 D.

⁷¹*Politicus* 297 E.

⁷²*Ibidem*, 294 A-B.

⁷³*Ibidem*, 295 A.

⁷⁴*Republic* 473 C.

Plato's admiration of Sparta is shown in many passages⁷⁹, but he was by no means blind to her deficiencies⁸⁰, and did not exclude her from general condemnations of all contemporary States⁸¹. He used Sparta simply as an example of a State which had been able to build up a national *phos*, though not of the highest type, by a system of state training.

Of the charge based upon Plato's Sicilian journeys little need be said. Long residence abroad is not in itself a proof of disloyalty. Like later missionaries, Plato believed that he could do more for the good of mankind abroad than at home. After the death of Socrates he cannot be blamed for leaving Athens; rather it is to his credit that he returned at all. Plato was undoubtedly a better cosmopolite than many of his fellow-citizens, but his feelings toward his native country may be judged from the patriotism of many passages, particularly in the *Apology* and the *Crito*. Even if the words there are those of Socrates, it is difficult to believe that Plato would have preserved them in such a form if he considered them quixotic.

But, it may be argued, if Plato was not disloyal, he was at least unsympathetic to Athenian democracy. Such a charge cannot be absolutely denied, but there is something to be said on the other side. It is possible to make too much of Plato's connection with Critias, Charmides, and Antiphon, for the earlier affiliations of his relatives seem to have been with the Periclean democracy, and it was only in the later years of the Peloponnesian War that they were driven into the oligarchic party by the policies of Pericles's successors⁸². It is unlikely, then, that the influence of Plato's connections should have given him any deeply-rooted aristocratic prejudice, and his personal predilections may be inferred from the passage from the *Seventh Platonic Epistle* already quoted. From this we see that his adherence to the Thirty was largely a personal and accidental matter and that later he was almost as willing to cooperate with the restored democracy. It is difficult to classify him politically. What, for example, are we to make of the radical communism of the *Republic*? From his advocacy of a mixed form of government in several passages in the *Laws*⁸³ and from the general tone of the *Menexenus* it might be argued with some plausibility that his sympathies would be with the Moderate Party which stood for a 'polity' in Aristotle's sense of the term. Finally, his many critical references to Athens and her government must not lead us to lose sight of other passages, fewer in number, which are distinctly laudatory. We can hardly assume that any favorable references are mere lip-service.

This raises the question, How are we to account for his exceedingly varying estimates? There is really no inconsistency. Plato's views remained fundamentally unchanged. We merely have differences due to different moods. In the one he is an uncompromising idealist, un-

willing to abate in the slightest his rigid intellectual requirements; in the other he is willing to recognize the limitations of composite human nature, to allow for things as they are, and to make the best of the available material. In one he demands reason and knowledge to the exclusion of all else; in the other he is ready to admit that right opinion is at least a respectable second best. In one he will have nothing but his ideal State; in the other he can speak favorably of Athens, particularly the Athens of the past. Like the guardians of the *Republic*, Plato spends much of his time in the lofty region of philosophic thought, but he is ready at times to go into the cave and to attune his thought to its requirements. This fact is worth emphasizing, because it is sometimes assumed that Plato is so ruthlessly critical and so uncompromisingly idealistic as to lose all touch with reality, and that he sets up so impossible a standard as to make his views valueless. There is, for example, a tendency to contrast Plato with Aristotle in such a way as to imply that each was everything that the other was not, and that Aristotle always kept his feet on the ground, while Plato was continually losing himself in the clouds.

With his varying moods Plato varies his literary methods and devices. His weapons are many—exhortation, satire, humorous banter, and close argument. Undoubtedly some of these features of his writings may tend to obscure the real unity of his thought and to prevent a greater appreciation of his practical criticisms. Thus for some readers he is too paradoxical, for others too much given to preaching, for others too prone to petulant fault finding, and for others too apt to indulge in wild flights of imagination and positive romancing. For example, some of his criticisms and eulogies of Athens may seem to be overdrawn or fanciful. But in both cases the exaggeration is easily explicable. Satire is a very effective means of criticism. But the satirist has an almost irresistible temptation to let himself go and to paint his picture in the strongest colors. In his fanciful eulogies of the past of Athens there may perhaps be a deliberate piece of propaganda, a suggestion that his own political program had historical precedents or at least that it involved getting back to ideals and principles which had prevailed in the past⁸⁴.

Plato, then, may be either an idealist or a practical critic, according to his mood. The problems of politics may be attacked in two different ways. The first is to suppose that the slate is wiped clean and to ask what would be the ideally best government to set up. To the Greeks this would not appear to be a wildly impractical idea, in view of the activities of founders of colonies, lawgivers, and political commissions. The second method is to attack the other end of the problem and to ask what is wrong with things as they are. Plato offered to the Athenians the ideal of a government of philosopher-kings, or as a second best the mixed constitution of the *Laws*, adding, in effect, the advice that, if they must have a democracy, they should at least try to go back to the superior democracy of the old days with its greater unity and efficiency and be-

⁸⁴We may perhaps compare the rather idealized pictures which Guild Socialists have drawn of the old craft guilds.

⁷⁹*Crito* 52 E, *Phaedrus* 260 E, *Protagoras* 342 A-343 C, *Alcibiades I* 122 C, *Republic* 544 C, *Laws* 660 B-E, 691 D-692 A, 712 D-E.

⁸⁰*Republic* 547 D-548 A, *Laws* 634 A, 660 E.

⁸¹*Republic* 407 A-B, *Politicus* 303 C.

⁸²Compare G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries*, 4-5 (London, Methuen, 1930).

⁸³*Laws* 753 B, 756 E-757 A, 691 D-692 A, 693 D-E, 698 A-B.

lief in the educative function of the State. His chief criticism of contemporary democracy was that it was forgetting its own former ideal and developing in the wrong direction. In the growing disunity of the city he saw a serious danger of the general adoption of the doctrines of ethical nihilism which were preached by Thrasyarchus, Callicles, and their like.

In his youth Plato had gained practical experience in his military service and political activity; later he had learnt much from travel and observation and still more, perhaps, from his active intervention in the affairs of Syracuse. Further, there is evidence that he was consulted by several cities on practical constitutional problems. He therefore must not be regarded as a mere recluse or arm chair theorist or professor, but as a practical and scientific reformer.

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REVIEWS

Selections from Latin Prose and Poetry. An Introduction to Roman Literature. By Karl Pomeroy Harrington and Kenneth Scott. Boston: Ginn (1933). Pp. xxiv, 624.

This book, "intended especially for College freshmen . . ." (Preface, v), is rather an innovation, and its life-history will be watched with interest. Freshmen in College encountering the book for the first time will have had four years' experience with, probably, four or five prose writers and at least two poets. They will therefore find less difficulty in mastering the language and the style of a long list of authors than they would have found in attacking a similar book of numerous selections in the earlier years of their Latin course.

The editors have approached their task with scholarship and sympathy. A more interesting, more representative, more refreshing collection of treasures from the vast storehouse of Roman literature could not be imagined. Naturally the selections are presented in the time-order of the development of Latin literary art. They give us a literary 'movie' from Ennius, the first great writer of Rome, who was born in 239 B. C., to Claudian, born about 370 A. D., and to Macrobius, who was Governor of Africa in 410, a stretch of about 650 years. This is a period only slightly longer than that from Chaucer to the present day. Latin developed to the Golden Age, and then declined. English likewise reached a dramatic peak in Shakespeare and a more general literary peak in the Victorian authors, and has apparently entered upon a definite period of decline, characterized by sex-fiction and other blemishes. There are also the abuse and the degradation of the language itself by authors of the perverted talent of Ring Lardner. To reach such degradation of the Latin tongue we must go forward several centuries from the limits of this book.

The excerpts from each author are preceded by a brief account of his life and his works, and an estimate of the latter. Complete editions are named, and certain collateral reading is recommended. Selections are given from the works of fifty-six authors, of whom twenty-

four are poets. Horace heads the list in total length of the quotations, with eighty-seven pages (159-247: introductory note, text, and notes below the text); Livy comes next, with fifty-two pages. Every phase of Roman Literature is sampled except the dry bones of the law; and upon this omission the editors are to be congratulated. We could wish that some of the charming verse of the *Poetae Minores* had been included. There are little gems to be found there with a modern touch that is delightful. There are the riddles of Symphosius, and trifles of the daily life of the streets, the rope-dancer, the little dog and his blind master, and a recipe in verse for the making of the ancestor of the 'pasty' of Merrie England and our own potpie. And there is, too, the exquisite *Pervigilium Veneris*, that "last lament of expiring Epicureanism". But we could not have them all; and what we have is of vivid interest.

An excellent feature is the treatment of the various meters *en bloc* in the prefatory pages. There is also a list of technical terms (xxiii-xxiv). The Notes are interesting, useful, and adequate, though necessarily condensed. Too much praise can not be given to the editors for the splendid vocabulary, covering 156 pages. Its compilation was a task of huge labor, but every hour spent upon the making of it has been richly repaid in the accomplishment. Why a college freshman should be penalized by being compelled to handle a five-pound dictionary is one of the unanswered riddles. In the later years of the course compendious lexicons are a vital necessity. The book, we believe, will prove a delight and a decided incentive to students to proceed further and to dig up many of the other gems and nuggets in the mine.

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Latin Prose Literature, Cato to Suetonius. By Maurice W. Avery. Boston: Little, Brown and Company (1931). Pp. xii, 400.

Here is another volume of selections, this time limited to prose and covering the span from 234 B. C. to about 140 A. D. The works of sixteen authors are represented: Cato, Varro, Cicero, Caesar, Sallust, Nepos, Livy, Seneca Rhetor, Velleius Paterculus, Q. Curtius Rufus, Petronius, Seneca the Younger, Quintilian, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Suetonius. The greatest space is allotted to Cicero, forty-three pages (17-59). It does not seem that the portions selected are by any means those of the most vivid interest. It appears particularly regrettable that Selection 29 from Cicero (page 59) was included at all. This is a letter of congratulation (*Ad Familiares* 6.15) written by Cicero to Lucius Minucius Basilus, one of the murderers of Caesar. The attitude of Cicero toward Caesar reflects no credit upon the former; Caesar's attitude toward Cicero, on the contrary, displayed the utmost magnanimity. That a man who could write Selection 11 (a eulogy of Caesar, from the *Pro Marcello*) should be capable of writing Selection 29 in eulogy of a murderer of the hero of Selection 11 exhibits the lawyer-philosopher in a sorry light. But perhaps that was the editor's intention. Some of the charming lighter letters of Cicero should have been in-

cluded, as well as letters of Pliny in similar vein, in order to lift a certain pall of seriousness and ponderosity which seems at least to have threatened to settle upon the book. Of course the brief selections from Petronius are in lighter vein, but the book suffers by the inclusion of no poetry.

The Notes (257-398) are illuminating and satisfying; and a hint as to vocabulary difficulties is given at the close of the Preface (vii). A separate vocabulary would have been a boon to the students. On pages 399-400 there is an Index: The Sources of the Selections.

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PLATO AND LEONARDO DA VINCI

It is generally conceded that Leonardo da Vinci, the versatile artist and scientist of the Renaissance, was little concerned with the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers, even though he was living in Florence at a time when the Platonic Academy of Lorenzo was at its height, and Argyropoulos and Marsilio Ficino were fascinating the Florentines with the rediscovery of Aristotle and Plato. Leonardo is believed to have had a rudimentary knowledge of Aristotle¹. Concerning Leonardo and Plato modern opinion is well expressed by Muntz²:

I shall be satisfied with examining one problem to which my predecessors have paid scant attention: What influence did Marsilio Ficino, the champion of Neo-platonic philosophy, exercise over Leonardo? The "Theologica Platonica" had appeared at Florence in 1482, that is, before Leonardo had quitted his native city for Milan; his ideas, therefore, might have been strongly affected by it, but as a fact, they were not. Platonic philosophy seems, indeed, to have counted for little in Leonardo's mind.

Nevertheless, there exists a bit of evidence which seems to prove a definite connection between Plato and Leonardo, and it is truly remarkable that this evidence has been so long overlooked. Perhaps it is too obvious.

Almost everyone who has studied Greek has read, at one time or another, Plato's *Phaedo*, the story of the death of Socrates. In the *Phaedo* (60 B) is the well-

known passage in which Socrates speaks of the close connection between pleasure and pain, emphasizing their inseparability, 'as if the two were joined together in one head'.

These words of the *Phaedo* are very striking and not easily forgotten, and, when we remember Leonardo's sketch³ of the body with two heads and four arms representing the unity of pleasure and pain, we must admit that here, at least, is very probably the influence of Plato.

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A CORRECTION AND ADDENDUM TO PROFESSOR GUINAGH'S ARNOBIANA

In THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 29.69-70 (January 6, 1936) Professor Kevin Guinagh had a short article entitled *Arnobiana*.

I had considerable correspondence with Professor Guinagh concerning this paper, in particular because I asked him to be good enough to supply the fullest possible details with respect to the publication of the various articles and books which he mentions. At the time I prepared this article for printing in THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY I was in a hospital at Lexington, Kentucky. It proved very difficult to keep track of accumulating papers. Unhappily, I overlooked an important memorandum which Professor Guinagh had sent to me in a letter concerning a recent addition to *Arnobiana*:

Marchesi, C.: *Arnobii Adversus Nationes Libri VII*. This edition of Arnobius is Number 62 of the *Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum Paravianum* (Turin, Paravia, et Socii 1935. Pp. x, 435).

Almost immediately after the publication of Professor Guinagh's article Professor M. L. W. Laistner, of Cornell University, called my attention to this edition of Arnobius. He added that the book is reviewed at some length, favorably, by Sisto Colombo in *Rivista di Filologia e d'Istruzione Classica* 13.390-392 (September, 1935).

CHARLES KNAPP

¹See Ivor Blashka Hart, *Mechanical Investigations of Leonardo da Vinci*, 37 (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Company, 1925).

²Eugene Muntz, *Leonardo da Vinci*, 2.39-40 (New York, Scribner, 1898. Two volumes).

³Now in the collection at Christ Church, Oxford. It is, curiously enough, reproduced in Muntz, 2.53 (see note 2, above).